



Proceedings of the Graduate Greater Louisville: High School Dropout Solutions Summit

Bellarmine University – July 30, 2008

“Today there is a high school dropout epidemic in America that threatens our very ability to keep pace with the increasingly demanding and globally competitive economy, is costing our nation billions of dollars annually and is diminishing the productivity and happiness of millions of our young people.”

Ending the Silent Epidemic

“One in four is just too many, and every student matters. We need to find a way to keep teenagers in schools and this summit is the first step toward developing a clear, community-wide action plan.”

**Mayor Jerry Abramson
Louisville, Kentucky**



“It is our job to pull together as a community with all of our community resources to be certain we give every child the support system he or she needs to graduate from high school prepared to pursue a productive life.”

**Dr. Sheldon Berman; Superintendent
Jefferson County Public Schools**

For more information on the summit and other dropout issues, please log onto the Louisville Metro website at www.louisvilleky.gov and type the keyword “dropout” into the search box.

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For more information, please log on to the
Louisville Metro website at www.louisvilleky.gov and
type the keyword "dropout" into the search box. Or call or email
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Graduate! Greater Louisville: High School Dropout Solutions Summit

Introduction

A communitywide campaign of unprecedented scope is now being mounted to attack one of Louisville's most stubborn and damaging educational challenges: the historically high proportion of our teens who give up on education even before finishing high school.

If those young people and our community are to prosper in the economy of tomorrow, this long-standing, deeply entrenched and complex problem must finally be vanquished. More than ever before, ensuring the educational proficiency of all of our young people is both a pressing moral obligation and a critical economic imperative.

Recognizing the urgent need for new, more effective approaches, Mayor Jerry Abramson and Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) Superintendent Sheldon Berman joined forces in early 2008 to begin the development of a sustained, coordinated and communitywide strategy for success.

Their first step was to convene the Graduate! Greater Louisville High School Dropout Solutions Summit at Bellarmine University on July 30, 2008. It was organized in conjunction with America's Promise: The Alliance for Youth, and was among the first of what this national organization hopes will be similar undertakings in all 50 states.

The response to the local leaders' call for participation was an outpouring of concern and commitment. Nearly 500 people took part in the summit, and they came from every sector of the community, ranging from educators, youth service workers and juvenile justice authorities to business leaders, public officials and neighborhood activists.

The day's work was structured to reflect what has become clear to those closest to the problem: While schools and educators must be in the vanguard of adopting fundamentally new approaches, they alone cannot counteract the large and complex array of personal, family and social circumstances that lead students to drop out.

Children are in school just six hours a day, five days a week, 35 weeks a year. If we are to succeed in holding onto those who now slip away, our educators will need more partners, and more effective partners, throughout the community, from health and social service agencies to businesses and neighborhood groups.

The summit was designed to bring together representatives of all those potential partners to examine the issue from their multiple perspectives and to generate an initial set of recommendations in four broad areas:

- creating multiple pathways to graduation
- strengthening community-based student supports
- expanding and improving the life-readiness components of education, and
- reforming official policies to ensure they support rather than hinder high school completion.

Following the morning's general session, participants attended a breakout session in one of those four tracks. Each group began by examining existing strengths, weaknesses, and best practices, then generated an array of possible actions and concluded by building consensus about the most promising and/or pressing of those recommendations.

This report summarizes the summit's proceedings. For more information, including a comprehensive set of links to the latest research and reports, and to find out how you or your organization can join this important movement, go to

http://www.louisvilleky.gov/OYD/dropout_summit/

The Call to Action

“One in four is too many” was the stark motto of the Graduate Greater Louisville High School Dropout Solutions Summit, and it kept front and center the disturbing extent of the problem that the participants had been assembled to attack.

At least one of every four students who enter 9th grade does not graduate from public high school in four years. At least a quarter of our young people are leaving school without either the diploma or the skills that are now the minimal requirements for productive employment.

It is a tragedy for them, and a threat to our community’s future. From every perspective – ethical, social, economic – it is no longer acceptable. Of that, Mayor Abramson and Dr. Berman left no doubt in their opening charge to the summit.

They forcefully affirmed their shared belief that smart, concerted and coordinated action by an engaged community and educational institutions can make a significant difference, and also their shared determination that Louisville must and will make that difference. They pledged themselves and the community to achieving **two ambitious goals within 10 years**:

- 1) to cut the dropout rate by at least half and**
- 2) to raise Louisville’s high school graduation rate into the top tier among 15 peer cities.**

“One in four is just too many, and every student matters,” Mayor Abramson told the summit. “We need to find a way to keep teenagers in schools, and this summit is the first step toward developing a clear, communitywide action plan.”

He praised the participants for coming together around a topic of such critical importance to Louisville’s social health and economic welfare, noting that a community’s economic prospects are inextricably tied to the education levels of its workforce.

He pointed out the summit’s place in the comprehensive Graduate Greater Louisville agenda to boost educational attainment at every level. And he framed the breadth of the challenge to habitual ways of thinking this way:

“We love to boast about our National Merit Semifinalists. We love to praise our kids with perfect attendance and outstanding community service. We love to honor students on athletic fields. But what about the 1 in 4 who don’t graduate in 4 years? What about the young people, who

have high absentee rates, who begin to lag behind long before 9th grade, who may live in a different Louisville where a high school degree looks optional? The quiet girls who somehow slip away, mentioning personal and family problems? ... The unruly boys who sleep in class, don't fit in, and don't finish?"

Most often, as the Mayor suggested, **dropping out is just the culmination of a long, emotionally fraught and academically troubled process of disengagement from school that began much earlier.** What's required in response, Dr. Berman told the summit, are fundamental changes in schools' culture to keep students connected and progressing, by making instruction more challenging, engaging and empowering and the environment more personalized and socially supportive. He described a broad array of initiatives that JCPS is already beginning to combat the process of disengagement, to recognize and intervene earlier if it does begin and to increase at every level not only student achievement but also students' connections to each other, their schools and the larger world in which they live and will one day work.

Among these initiatives are CARE for Kids program, the class-size reduction pilots and the return of school nurses in elementary schools; the new emphasis on civics and service learning in middle schools; and the expansion in high schools of freshman academies, smaller learning communities, the trimester schedule and more comprehensive career exploration/preparation.

Citing the crucial role that broad community participation has played in the success of Every1Reads, Berman emphasized the need for similar partnerships in the dropout prevention campaign.

"It is our job," he said, "to pull together as a community with all of our community resources to be certain we give every child the support system he or she needs to graduate from high school prepared to pursue a productive life."

FRAMING THE ISSUE

The national perspective

Louisville's dropout problem is a microcosm of what has been called the "silent epidemic" plaguing cities throughout America. The summit's keynote speaker, former West Virginia Gov. Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education (www.all4ed.org), spelled out the sobering extent and costly consequences of that epidemic, as well as outlining the most promising responses.

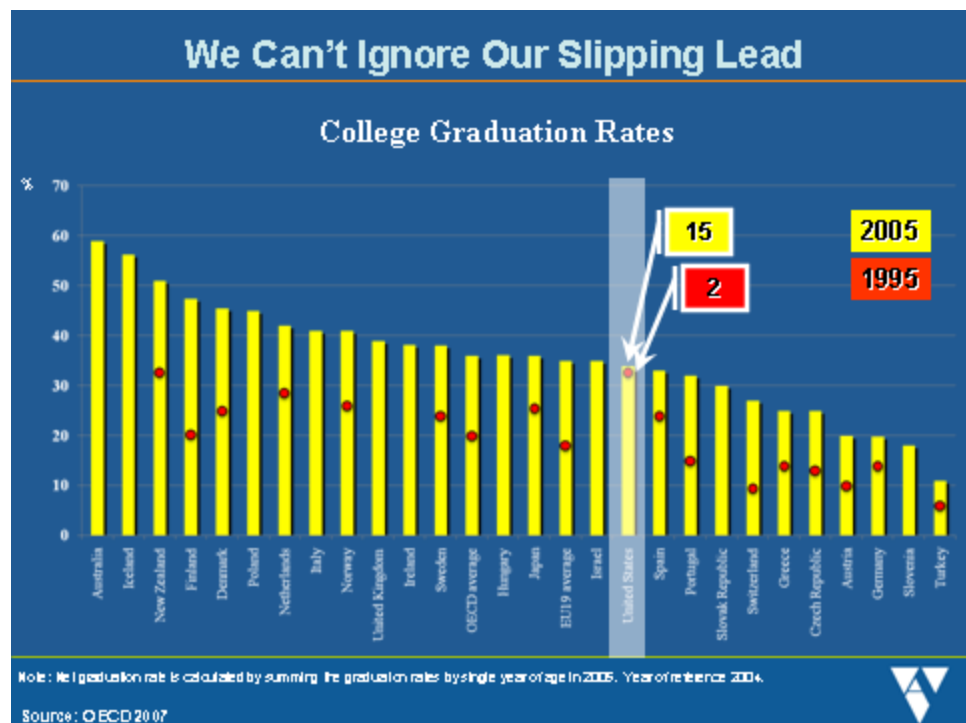
"Three out of every 10 students nationally do not graduate from high school," he told the summit. "About a third who graduate are not college- and work-ready." He added to the urgency with this statistic: 7,000 students drop out every day in America.

Such large educational deficits were acceptable throughout most of the 20th Century, when industrial jobs were plentiful for under-educated workers, Wise said. Today, they no longer are; America needs every person to be at least a high school graduate if it is to maintain its economic competitiveness.

Domestically, the proportion of jobs requiring only manual or routine work has fallen sharply, he explained. A few well-trained technical workers in today's automated, computerized plants now do what scores of lesser skilled workers once did. Even labor-intensive industries such as coal mining now seek out better-educated workers to

handle today's more sophisticated machinery and processes.

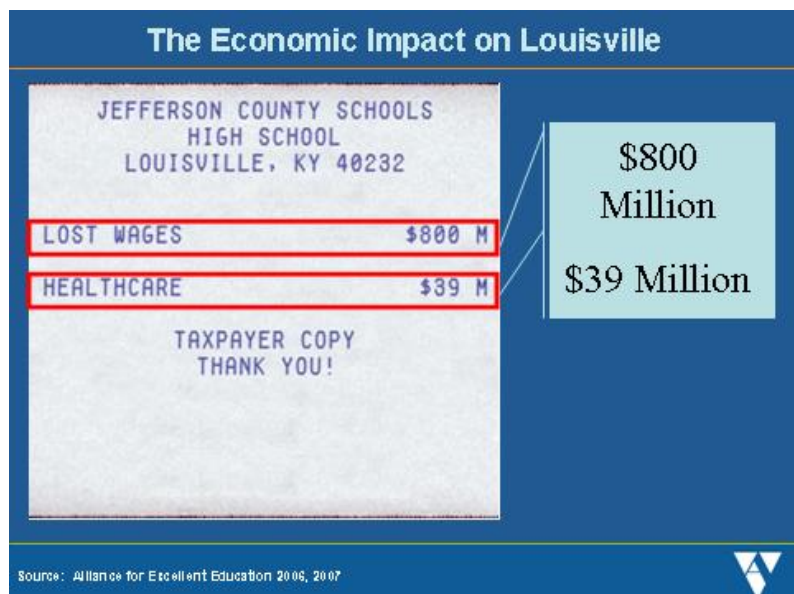
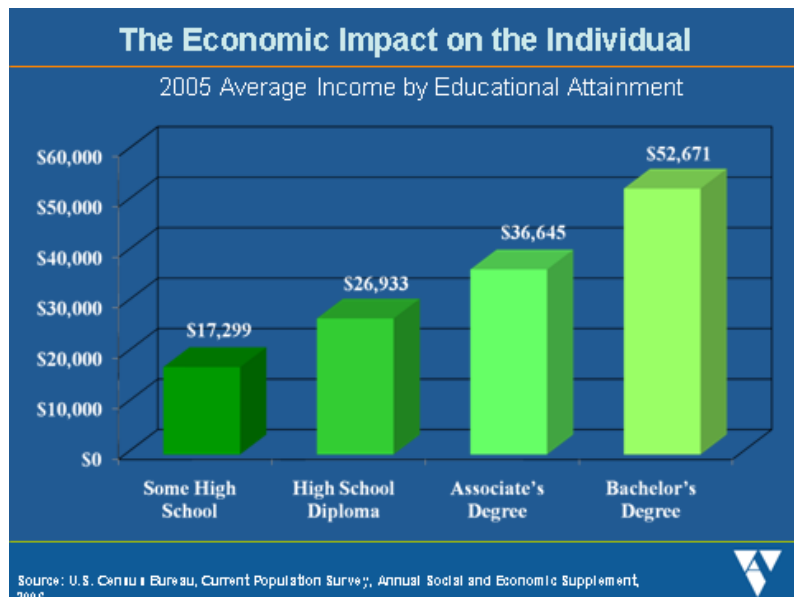
Globally, other nations are now doing better than America in preparing their young for the knowledge-based jobs of the 21st Century.



Wise cited international comparisons showing that between 1995 and 2005, the United States' college graduation rate fell from second best among the world's nations to 15th.

As a result, our country is bearing large and lasting costs. On the individual level, Wise said, the average dropout's annual income of \$17,299 is nearly \$10,000 below what a high school graduate makes, and is less than half of the \$36,645 that the holder of an associate's degree earns.

At the community level, he said, such large numbers of uncompetitive, unproductive workers impose high costs on the larger public. Citizens bear the burden directly in the form of more costly health care, social welfare, compensatory education and criminal justice system programs. And they pay indirectly in the form of lost economic vitality and competitiveness.



Wise estimates that Louisville's dropouts cost the community nearly \$800 million in lost wages and \$39 million in health care expenses each year. (Governor Wise' estimates are based on the estimated percentage of dropout in the Class of 2004-05.)

Dropping out occurs everywhere and within all groups, but is far more prevalent in large, urban areas, in already distressed neighborhoods and among African-American and Hispanic youths. As a result, just 12 percent of America's schools account for nearly half of its dropouts, Wise said. Further, the individual children most likely to become dropouts can be identified as early as 6th grade from a variety of early warning signs. Distress signals include excessive absences, reading below grade level, being retained and/or falling off track because of academic difficulties, and serious discipline referrals.

Conversely, students who are engaged in extra and co-curricular programs, who can identify at least one caring adult in their life other than a parent, who can and do attend school regularly, and who participate in school breakfast and/or lunch programs significantly increase the likelihood of progressing to graduation (Achieve Inc., 2004).

These patterns mean prevention efforts can and must be smartly targeted, Wise said, but they will require innovation and resources for what he called the "forgotten middle" -- the middle school and high school years, which have so far received much less attention and many fewer federal resources than K-6 and postsecondary education.

Long before they drop out, students show academic distress signals –

- **Low attendance**
- **Failing course grades**
- **Low GPA**
- **Low achievement test scores**
- **Grade repetition**
- **Under-credited**
- **Engagement factors**
- **Over-age**
- **Disciplinary problems**

The local data

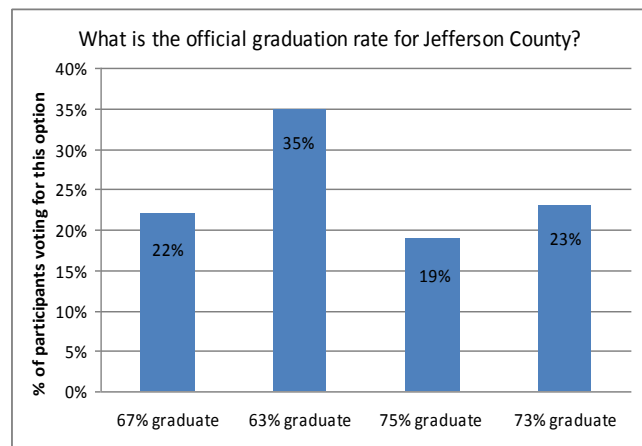
For Louisville, as for most other communities, “getting a handle” on the data around dropout rates, high school completion rates, and determining who is most likely to drop out of school is challenging. Prior to the summit, a committee spent months reviewing available data. For them, particularly telling was data from an in-depth study of dropouts where JCPS “looked back” at 1,755 students who dropped out during the 2006-07 school year. JCPS researchers examined the school careers (in elementary, middle and high school) of these students, comparing them with youngsters who had not dropped out. They looked into number of student absences, how they performed academically, how often they moved between schools, and how often they had been suspended.

This 2006-07 data became the base of the local data presentation portion of the summit, and for large charts that were posted in the breakout rooms. Dr. Terry Brooks, Executive Director of Kentucky Youth Advocates (KYA), was chosen to present local data during the summit. KYA is the non-profit organization that gathers data for the Casey Foundation publication *Kids Count*.

Perception versus reality. Rather than present charts and graphs to demonstrate the local scope of the dropout issue, in an effort to make the presentation interactive, the summit planners used a “press voting system” owned by the school system. Dr. Brooks asked participants to select the “right” answer to questions posted on a large screen. Summit participants used handheld voting devices to select the correct answer to multiple choice questions. The handheld vote was tallied and shown on the screen – then the correct answer was revealed. Press voting proved to be an intriguing way to present the data. Most of the people in the room – largely human service, education and public policy professionals – were surprised to see that they often did not know the correct answers to the data questions. *If their perceptions were in error, they thought, what about the general public?*

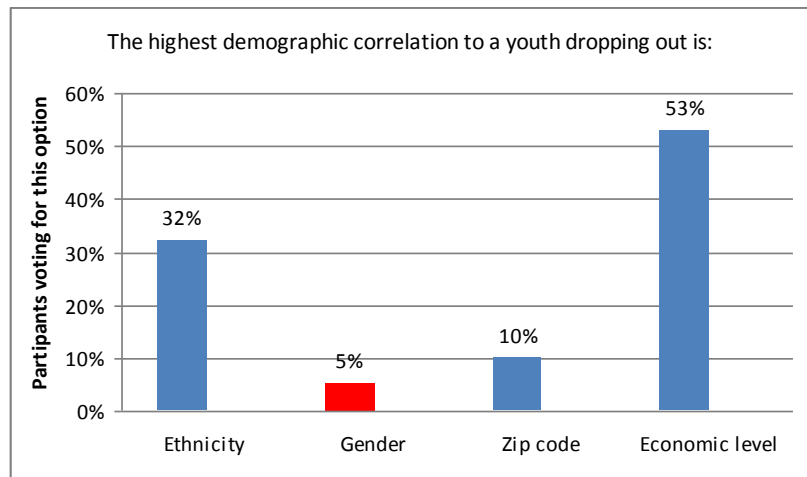
Number of dropouts. Dr. Brooks began his presentation by telling participants that on average about 1,800 students drop out of JCPS each year – and that data compiled by JCPS regarding dropouts during the 2006-07 school year largely mirror the national picture. During that year, 1,755 Jefferson County Public Schools students in grades 9-12 dropped out – roughly 50 every week of the school year.

Graduation rates. *Participants were asked to select the official 4-year graduation rate for Jefferson County.* When asked this question, participants’ answers ranged across the board. Dr. Brooks explained that the answer depended on which group measured the rate and how the rate was calculated. For instance, in 2004 the



National Center for Education Statistics figured the rate at 67 percent, the Education Research Center at 63 percent, the Kentucky Department of Education at 75 percent, and the US Department of Education at 73 percent. In this sense, no one answer was correct. His “takeaway” for the group mirrored Mayor Abramson’s statement in the opening session: whether it is 67 percent (one in three is too many) or 75 percent, the highest graduate rate calculated, ***one in four is too many!***

Demographic correlates. *Dr. Brooks asked Summit participants to choose “the highest demographic correlate to a youth dropping out.” The possible answers were: ethnicity, gender, zip code, and economic level.* Again, though most (53 percent) chose “economic level,” gender most closely correlated with dropping out.



Gender. *Participants also were asked to select the demographic that most correlated with a youth dropping out – and all but 5 percent chose the wrong answer. Among dropouts in 2006-07 – the year of the JCPS in-depth study, boys significantly outnumbered girls.*

While whites outnumbered blacks in absolute terms, the drop-out rate is disproportionately highest among African-American and Hispanic males. Over-aged males and those lacking the credits to graduate are more likely to drop out than those students at age-appropriate grade levels of either gender.

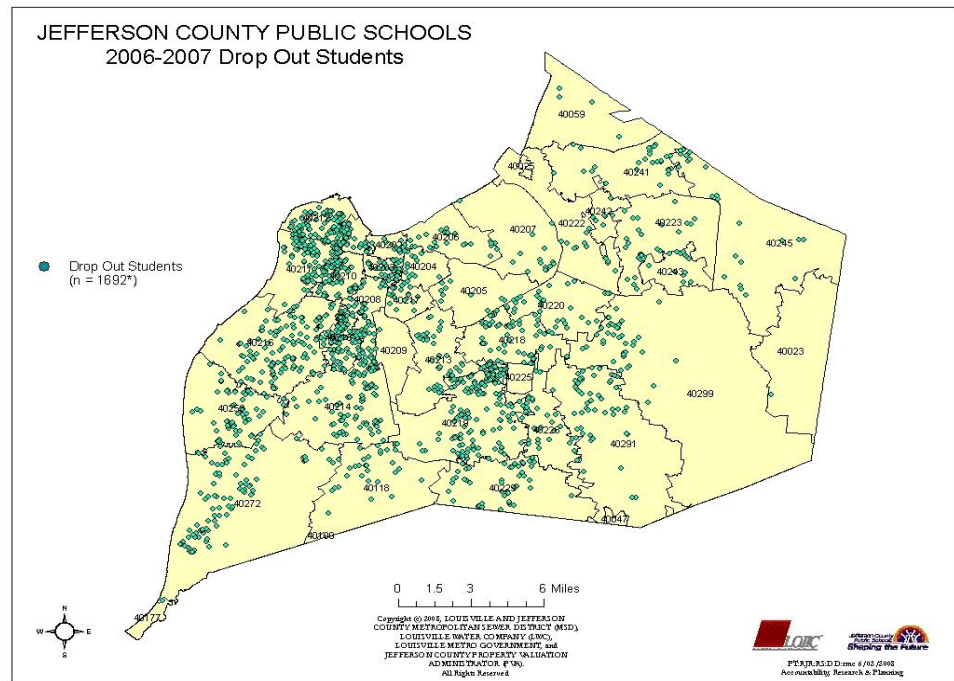
Comparison of students who dropped out in 2006-07 school year to JCPS District average			
		<u>Dropouts</u>	<u>District</u>
<u>Ethnicity</u>	African American	38.50%	35.10%
	White	53.40%	58.20%
	Hispanic	4.80%	3.10%
	Other	3.30%	3.10%
<u>Gender</u>	Male	59.80%	50.50%
	Female	40.20%	49.50%

Ethnicity. In addition to a disproportional number of males versus females dropping out, the data from the 2006-07 study also looked at ethnicity. Indeed, a greater percentage of non-white students dropped out than the general JCPS population of students. The

chart at the right gives a break-down of students who dropped out in 2006-07 by ethnicity and gender, and compares dropout rates to the JCPS district as a whole.

Zip code.

As the adjacent map shows, no zip code area is immune, but in Louisville, as nationally, the problem is concentrated in economically distressed urban neighborhoods in the western portions of the community.

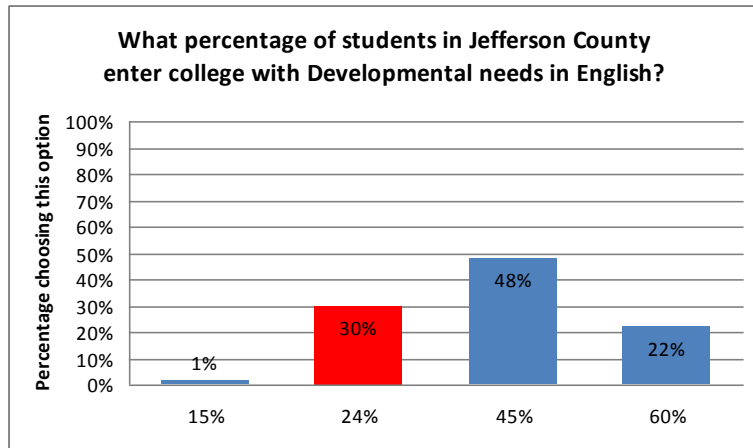


Socioeconomic status. In the 2006-07 study group, those students qualifying for free or reduced lunches account for 55.4 percent of all high school dropouts. Those who are receiving or have received ECE services sometime in their schooling account for 23.8 percent of all high school dropouts and LEP qualified students account for 6.5 percent of high school dropouts. More dropouts take place from January to May, 54.1 percent, than from August to December, 45.9 percent.

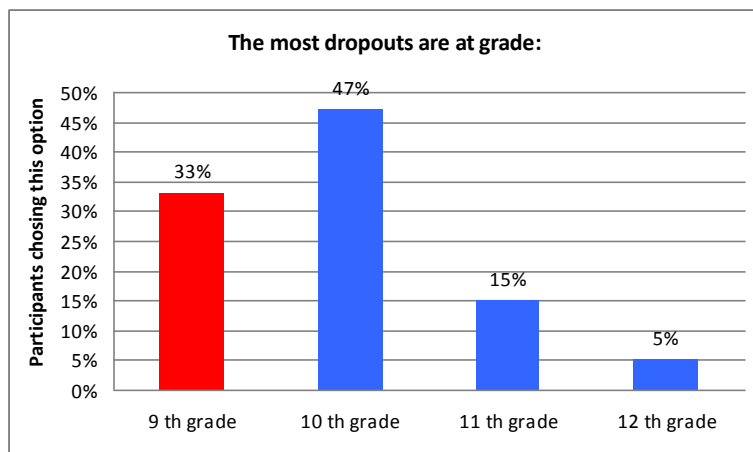
Academic performance. Low income levels correlate with higher dropout rates, but academic performance is also important. Examining student achievement among the 2006-07 study group on the Kentucky Core Content Test (KCCT) in reading shows that those scoring at the lowest level, novice, account for 25.3 percent of dropouts. Those scoring apprentice account for 41.5 percent of the dropouts, while those scoring proficient/distinguished account for a combined total of 14 percent. Those receiving “no score” for submitting incomplete tests or not having taken the test at all account for 19.2 percent of all high school dropouts. Thus some students who have average or even high achievement need personalized approaches. Others who do not fare as well need academic help to build self esteem and confidence.

College ready. Another measure of academic performance is the number of students entering college in need of remediation in core subject matter. *The summit participants were asked to choose the percentage of students who enter college (Jefferson Community and Technical*

College) with developmental needs in English. While most participants (48 percent) chose 45 percent of students needing remediation in English, the correct answer was 24 percent needing remedial help.



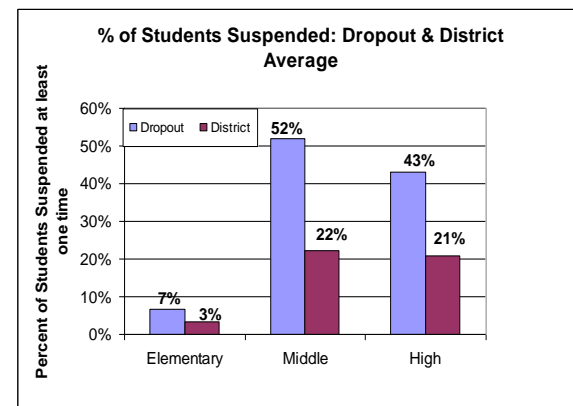
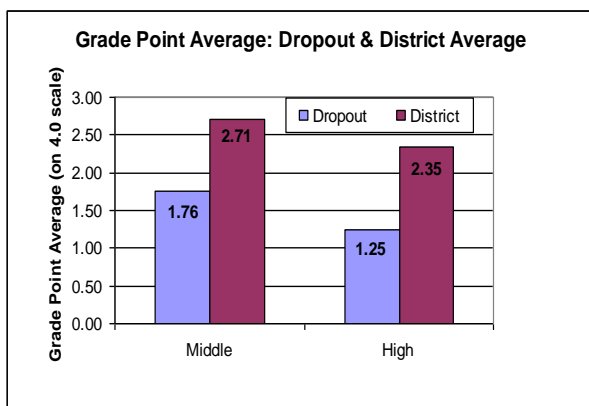
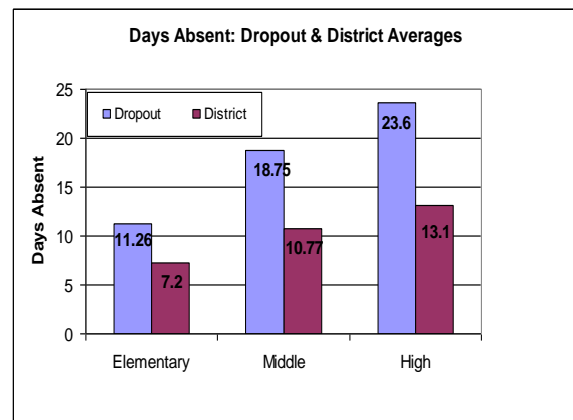
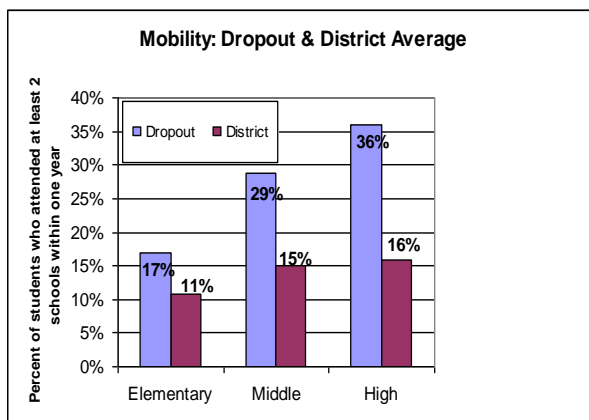
Grade level. *When asked at which grade most dropouts occurred, most participants selected the incorrect answer. Regardless of their grade, students ages 15, 16, and 17 account for the greatest number of dropouts. In grade nine, these ages account for 91.3 percent of all dropouts.*



Over age/under credit. As confirmed in the 2006-07 study, students who were “over age” for their grade are in greater danger of dropping out. (We often call these students “over-age/under-credit.”) An examination of the data should begin by looking first to the ninth grade, where the grade where most dropouts occur nationally. A third (33 percent) of ninth grade dropouts in the 2006-07 study were 15-year-olds, while 38.5 percent were 16-year-olds, 19.8 percent were 17-year-olds and 3.2 percent were 18-year-olds. In accordance with Kentucky State Law, a student who has reached his or her sixteenth birthday may legally drop out of school. Over-age ninth graders – ages 16 and 17 – have been retained at least one, if not two, years. The likelihood of a 17-year-old ninth grader progressing to graduation is small without intense supports such as credit recovery programs and personal mentoring. Even with those supports the student faces immense personal and social challenges in his or her attempt to complete high school.

School structure. – In the 2006-07 study group, 86.1 percent of JCPS students were enrolled in “regular” schools and 13.9 percent in “alternative” schools. Relative to their proportion those attending alternative schools were more likely to drop out. When examining the school structure as related to high school dropouts, those enrolled in regular school settings account for 54.3 percent of the total, while those enrolled in state agency placements or in alternative school placements, whether for behavior and/or adjudication, account for 45.7 percent of all high school dropouts. Clearly, students drop out from all types of schools. About half drop out from “regular” schools and the rest – disproportionately to enrollment – drop out from “alternative” schools.

Risk factors. Again, in the in-depth study of dropouts from the 2006-07 school year, where JCPS “looked back” at 1,755 students’ school careers, JCPS researchers examined a number of variables among these students in elementary, middle and high school and compared them with district averages for youngsters who had not dropped out. As a group, the dropouts of 2006-07 were more likely to have had excessive absences, fallen behind academically, been retained or suspended, and moved between schools. These patterns became apparent as early as elementary school, suggesting a role for early intervention.



Student typology. It is important to note, that while dropouts overall share some of the same risk factors, different types of students need differing approaches. Adapting methodology from an article by M. Janosz, “Predicting different type of school dropouts: A typological approach with longitudinal samples” published in the *Journal of Educational Psychology* (1992), JCPS researchers looked closely at the 1755 students who dropped out in the school year 2006-07. The table below shows how those student dropouts fell into the typology categories described in the article.

Typology of students who dropped out of JCPS in 2006-07 (N = 1755)

Type		N	%
Quiet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No evidence of school misbehavior Good attendance Average achievement 	37	2.1%
Disengaged/Absent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Average-low level of misbehavior Low attendance Average-good achievement 	147	8.4%
Low Achiever	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low-average level of misbehavior Average attendance Low achievement 	350	19.9%
Maladjusted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High level of misbehavior Low attendance Low achievement 	365	20.8%
Disengaged/Absent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Average-high level of misbehavior Average attendance Low-average achievement 	445	25.4%

Note: Misbehavior measured by out of school suspensions; Attendance measured by days absent; Achievement measured by GPA.

JCPS also looked at the gender and ethnicity of this group of dropouts from 2006-07. The table at the right shows that white females who are slotted as “Quiet” or “Disengaged/Absent” are most likely to dropout, while white males who are “Low Achievers” and minority males who are “Maladjusted” or “Disengaged/Absent” are most likely dropouts.

Type/Gender/Ethnicity of 1755 JCPS student dropouts in 2006-07

Type by Ethnicity	White		Minority		%
Type	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Quiet	10.8	40.5	24.4	24.3	100%
Disengaged/Absent	26.5	44.8	10.8	17.6	100%
Low Achiever	30.5	24.8	24.3	20.3	100%
Maladjusted	29.4	11.7	43.6	15.6	100%
Disengaged/Absent	31.0	15.1	35.0	18.8	100%

Note: 12.5% missing; 10.9% does not fit into typology

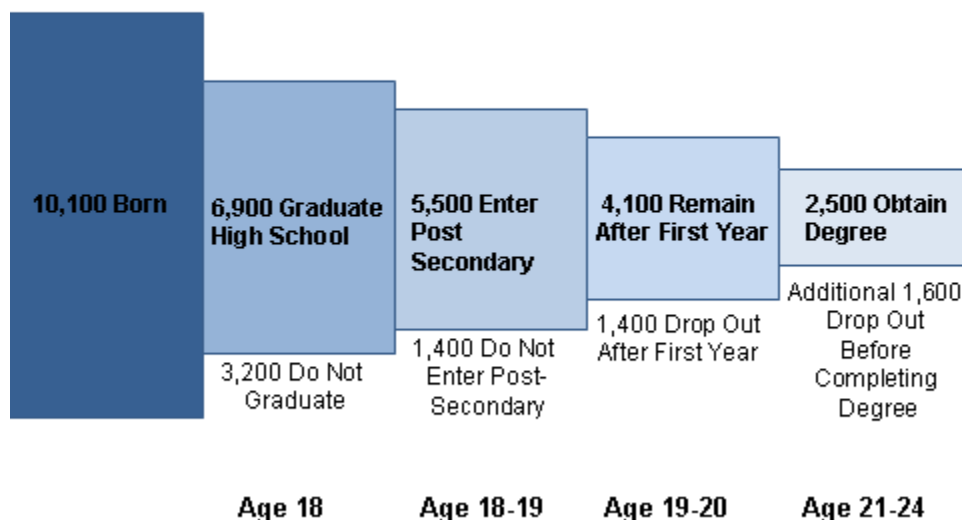
The Education Pipeline

Carolyn Gatz, director of The Greater Louisville Project (GLP), unveiled a graphical representation of the “Education Pipeline” for Jefferson County – part of GLP’s work to provide data and information to catalyze community action around the goal to: *Improve education attainment at all levels, including high school graduation rates, associate degrees and technical certificates, and double the projected growth in the number of young adults with a Bachelor’s Degree by the end of the decade.*

Data collected to create the “Education Pipeline” showed that approximately one third of the 10,100 children born in Jefferson County in a typical year will not graduate from high school. That number encompasses all of the bad outcomes that can occur in childhood, including dropping out of school. The best estimate of a high school graduation rate for Jefferson County Public Schools is 75% – meaning that one in four 9th graders who start high school do not graduate.

At the end of the pipeline, only about 25% – or one in four children born in a typical year – will earn a post secondary degree or credential necessary to compete for 21st century jobs.

The Jefferson County KY Education Pipeline: Birth Through College



The youth voice

The *Graduate! Greater Louisville High School Dropout Solutions Summit* turned the usual experts-only approach on its head and made the voice of students a cornerstone in thinking about guaranteeing success for every youth. Preparation for the summit began in March, and included nearly 300 young people, ages 14 to 24 years, who completed surveys, shared thoughts in focus groups and discussed their experiences in school. A number of those young people also took part in the summit's deliberations.

Common reasons young people disengage or dropout could be summarized by the following themes: schools are large and impersonal; the “feel” of school is a challenge; interest and involvement by adults and the community significantly impact student retention; most are hopeful about their future and acknowledge that success or failure is up to them; and courses often fail to teach material students believe is relevant to their lives and career goals or to reach them at their current level of understanding.

The students' blunt words reinforced the need for new approaches. For instance,

- 43 percent of young people who dropped out said they did so in part because “no one encouraged me to stay.”
- “My mom was the reason why I finished. She made me sign a contract that I would graduate and had me put my fingerprint on it.”
- “What would have helped me succeed would have been a positive role model that was willing to encourage me every day.”
- “If you aren't getting it, you need someone who will help you out. Schools just pass you to get you out of there.”
- “One high school had a better environment because the teachers cared and told you it mattered whether you cared.”
- “It's 90 percent the student and 10 percent the school. It's up to the student to learn.”

The experiences that the young people recounted and the perspectives they shared affirmed the overarching themes about what is necessary: more adult and community supports to help them through tough times, more personalized and smaller learning communities, more options to get students back on track when serious personal or academic problems disrupt their progress, and greater academic rigor and real-life relevance.

Reasons young people gave for dropping out varied. While youth and young adults shared many valuable comments about their experiences in high schools, one of the most insightful responses came from the question, “why did you dropout?” Focus group participants seemed guarded at times in sharing their personal stories. The anonymity of the survey provided the opportunity to learn more about why some young people choose to dropout of high school.

The chart below outlines the reasons survey respondents said contributed to their dropping out of school. The “reasons” are listed from most to least commonly selected. Respondents were able to choose as many “reasons” as they felt applied.

	A Major Reason	Somewhat a Reason	Not a Reason
Personal or family problems	20.7%	50.0%	29.3%
Got in trouble in school	31.0%	31.0%	37.9%
Bored in school	29.3%	31.0%	39.7%
Could not keep up with the work	12.1%	34.5%	53.4%
No one encouraged me to stay	13.8%	29.3%	56.9%
Money problems	15.5%	25.9%	58.6%
Classes were too hard	6.9%	32.8%	60.3%
Learning is hard for me	8.6%	27.6%	63.8%
To get a full time job	15.5%	19.0%	65.5%
Became a parent	15.5%	19.0%	65.5%
School environment	17.2%	17.2%	65.5%
Didn't fit in	5.2%	25.9%	69.0%
Discriminated against	12.1%	17.2%	70.7%
Parents needed me	12.1%	15.5%	72.4%
Housing	6.9%	20.7%	72.4%
Substance abuse problems	5.2%	20.7%	74.1%
Legal problems	12.1%	12.1%	75.9%
Illness or injury	5.2%	17.2%	77.6%
School did not have the courses I needed	6.9%	15.5%	77.6%
Physical disability	5.2%	13.8%	81.0%
Victim of a crime	6.9%	12.1%	81.0%
School was too easy	3.4%	15.5%	81.0%
Don't need school for what I want to do	5.2%	13.8%	81.0%
Criminal conviction	3.4%	15.5%	81.0%
Concerns about personal safety at school	5.2%	12.1%	82.8%
Friends encouraged me to drop out	5.2%	12.1%	82.8%
Family encouraged me to drop out	3.4%	12.1%	84.5%
Teachers encouraged me to drop out	6.9%	8.6%	84.5%

(For more information about *Youth Voice: In Their Own Words*, go to:

<http://www.louisvilleky.gov/NR/rdonlyres/B2B8A0C2-DA20-4918-98E7-74CE5F5579DC/0/YouthVoiceFinalCompressed.pdf>.)

WORKING TOWARD SOLUTIONS

Because a broad and complicated range of factors underlies the dropout problem, an equally broad range of strategies will be required to combat it. In preparation for the summit, the Summit Steering Committee identified four areas of special importance for on-going inquiry and action:

- *Policy Barriers to Graduation:* The expectation that all students must successfully complete a high school education is a radical shift from even the recent past, and many of our official policies, practices and laws have not been adjusted to reflect it. Everything from school accountability measures to truancy enforcement, from child welfare and health care programs to juvenile justice and family supports, must be reexamined to ensure they facilitate rather than impede educational success.
- *Student Supports:* The personal, familial, financial and social pressures our young people confront can be overwhelming. We must ensure that the out-of-school network of supports available to them is sufficient to provide the security, the guidance and the range of help they need.
- *Multiple Pathways/High School Innovation:* The high school experience must be restructured if schools are to hold onto and successfully educate the wide diversity of students who have traditionally dropped out. JCPS has been engaged for some time in expanding educational choices through its career magnets and alternative school initiatives, but much more innovation in options, organization and climate will be necessary to provide multiple and individualized pathways to graduation.
- *Life Readiness and Education Beyond High School:* From every corner – students, employers, technical schools and universities – there is wide agreement that our past and current approaches have succeeded in preparing well only a fraction of students for what comes next, whether it’s a job or further education. Establishing earlier, more direct and more effective alignment between students’ high school work and their post-graduation aspirations is a key to keeping them engaged in acquiring the knowledge and skills employers and postsecondary institutions require.

Summaries of the summit participants’ deliberations and recommendations in each of these four areas follow.

Policy Solutions

A policy, according to The American Heritage Dictionary, “is a plan or course of action intended to influence and determine decisions, actions and other matters.” In too many cases, the decisions and actions current policies foster are inconsistent with the steps necessary to reduce dropouts and encourage graduation.

At every level – individual schools, school districts, local governments and courts, and state and federal agencies and legislatures – policies need to be reexamined to assess their full impact. The *Graduate! Greater Louisville: High School Dropout Solutions Summit* addressed policy issues at each of these levels.

Preliminary work by a policy committee identified some 26 areas of opportunity for positive change, which participants discussed in table talks with expert advisers during the breakout session.

Many, though not all, of the policy areas examined dealt directly with the K-12 sector itself. One major discussion point was whether the mandatory age of school attendance should be raised from 16 to 18, in light of the need for greater academic proficiency and better preparation for adulthood and in conjunction with expansions of alternative learning opportunities. Another major focus was the impact of current accountability and assessment regimes. Currently, the way Kentucky assesses student and school performance is not aligned with mandated national testing (namely in the number of areas assessed; Kentucky has seven standards, No Child Left Behind has 3), and dropout prevention is given relatively little weight in high school accountability measures – a school’s score is more heavily weighted for academics than graduation. Other school-based policy discussions dealt with providing more flexibility for alternative diploma paths, strengthening Kentucky’s home-schooling laws, which are among the most permissive in the nation.

The impact of policies on the success of students’ transitions was also a dominant theme, especially the difficult issue of whether older middle school students who have failed several classes should be retained in middle schools or promoted to high school, for which they are unprepared. Additionally, the group explored other transition issues, ranging from ensuring that middle school students become more aware of the varied postsecondary opportunities to utilizing community-based youth programs to foster academic competencies. Regarding the transition from high school to postsecondary education, a primary theme was the potential to recalibrate the state Kentucky Educational Excellence Scholarships (KEES) program by extending it to GED recipients and to employment-related training.

At a communitywide level, there was a ready consensus on the need to align middle and high school student assignment plans with the newly adopted elementary plan to ensure consistent enrollment patterns, racial diversity and socio-economic heterogeneity for every school, and on the need to improve the handling of truancy cases, given that regular attendance is such a vital component to school success and graduation.

Recognizing that children's health is crucial to their success in school, the group also focused on possible health policy changes, ranging from insurance to diet. The group explored barriers to families enrolling in Kentucky Child Health Insurance Program (KCHIP) and Medicaid, and considered steps such as creating a single application for a number of health supports, including insurance and food stamps. Other health-policy issues concerned school programs to promote healthier lifestyles, the schools' food service requirements, and expansion of free/reduced lunch eligibility for older students through the Title I Program.

The participants in the policy track then faced the difficult task of prioritization. From their extensive discussion, the following recommendations emerged as the top priorities, listed in rank order:

1. Change Kentucky's statute for mandatory attendance in school from its current standard – age 6 to age 16 years – to age 5 to age 18 or graduation from high school.
2. Create a single application to access key social services, including KCHIP, food stamps, and free/reduced lunch.
3. Align Kentucky's accountability system to the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) measures.
4. Revise the federal NCLB model to include improvement (growth) metrics as a measure of success.

Student Supports Solutions

The Student Supports session opened with a depiction of the differences among youth during the last three generational decades. Through a montage of “generational speakers,” the participants looked at “growing up” over several decades through the eyes of these speakers. Speakers highlighted the hobbies, school subjects, pastimes and other generationally appropriate culture pieces for respective generations. Differences in slang and the number of television channels, in music and health issues, and in fashion crazes and pastimes were used to underscore generational change.

The focus then turned to the generational differences and similarities between the adults designing youth programs and the youth of today. Given the developmental needs and generational patterns of today’s teenagers, the nature of programming and the challenge of engagement were discussed, with emphasis on how to deepen community-based supports.

An overview of JCPS KidTrax data followed and heightened the participants’ awareness of current trend lines. For example, at older ages, fewer and fewer Louisville youth participate in community-based after-school programming, which parallels trend lines that show a decline in student achievement and an increase in dropout rates of high school-aged students. The KidTrax segment also noted that the after-school programs were not reaching out to the older students. The group then discussed the findings in light of the “Five Promises” to youth being championed by the America’s Promise Alliance: 1) safe places, 2) caring, competent adults, 3) healthy start through nutrition and exercise, 4) marketable skills, and 5) opportunities to after-school programming.

Lessons learned around programming were then applied to the concept of “Velcro” -- the intentional supports to connect individual students to significant adults. The concept of a Velcro-like bond between young people and institutional supports in schools and the community was exemplified through community-based examples of Velcro efforts. The Peace Education Program, Meyzeek Community School and the Presbyterian Community Center were highlighted within the context of sustained support for youth.

Then participants broke into small-group table discussions of the following questions:

1. What can you do in your role to help identify “Velcro” and connect students to school and after-school programs?
2. What student support services should be available?
3. What are some student support services recommendations that should emerge from this summit?
4. What should be the next steps after the summit?

A major topic of discussion was how to “Velcro” the students with after-school programs. The highest ranked recommendations included:

1. Expand transportation to get youth to jobs, programs and activities;
2. Improve relationships and participation of parents and community;
3. Expand funding and resources for education and after-school programs; and
4. Create incentives / stipends to keep youth involved.

The overarching message from this group was to personalize support for every middle and high school student. The delivery system must be diverse and far ranging. It may mean a family base for some, a school base for others, or a community program for others. The consistent thread is that every young person needs personalized attention to achieve success.

Multiple Pathways Solutions

If graduation rates are to increase and dropout rates decrease, students cannot face a one-size-fits-all model for secondary school success. This session looked at the many ways in which students now can earn a diploma and then examined ideas on how to expand the current set of options.

The session opened by reviewing the current options available to JCPS students to graduate. They include:

- *Alternative programs.* JCPS offers a range of alternative programming for students, including some stand-alone schools in separate locations. Other alternative schools are operated by state entities, including the Justice Cabinet and the Department of Community-based Services. Recently added to the district's programming are virtual school options, in which students work toward graduation through on-line learning.
- *School redesign.* Comprehensive high schools also can create different ways for students to achieve success. These efforts include fundamental restructuring of the typical high school day. Elements of restructuring may include how the faculty is organized and the use of time. Freshman Academies, for instance, resemble a middle-school team setting rather than a departmental approach. Instead of the traditional six-period day, different kinds of school schedules are showing promise for students of every level. Auxiliary programming, such as a "credit recovery" project or the Louisville Education and Employment Partnership, help students who fall behind to resume progress towards graduation.
- *Magnet programming.* Magnet schools and programs are a long-term feature of JCPS high school programming. The premise is simple: Allowing students to exercise choice and to pursue in-depth study in areas of interest – whether nursing or the performing arts, computer technology or international studies – the opportunities for rigor and relevance increase and so does the likelihood of student success.

Next on the agenda was a panel of young people who had dropped out. Consistent themes in their stories and their reasons for leaving were the lack of personalization and academic failure.

Following this presentation, small groups of the participants, joined by the youths, examined other potential pathways to success and formulated recommendations.

Discussion groups included those focusing on the role of Pre K-Grade 5 in high school success; the role of middle schools in high school success; family advocacy; safe neighborhoods and safe passages; and, service learning, jobs and internships.

The recommendations that emerged were:

1. Enhance student connections and relationships through a variety of strategies including:
 - Reduce class sizes
 - Create smaller learning communities
 - Enhance Child / Parent / Guardian advocate connection
 - Increase adult presence in community during travel times
 - Create K-8 schools (possibly ungraded)
2. Create and strengthen programs to meet student needs including:
 - Planned (4-year) service learning opportunities
 - Increasing safety net programs in all schools (LEEP, Home School Coordinators, mentoring, after school activities, 6th grade academy)
 - Increase quality and availability of alternative programming (e.g., replicate the Liberty High School philosophy in other locations)
 - Widely publicize all options for student engagement in schools.
3. Identify at-risk students early by:
 - Ensuring all students are reading on grade level
 - Identifying and providing interventions for all alcohol and drug use
 - Enacting early gang intervention, prevention and education
 - Coordinating the flow of non-academic information from K-12
4. Address student safety in multiple ways to include:
 - Ensuring safe passages to and from school through more adult presence
 - Create safe and caring classroom environments

The overarching priority of this group was to create smaller learning communities. Regardless of the specific school program or administrative features such as scheduling, smaller learning communities can ensure a focus on personal interests, support individual learning styles, create a sense of relationships and build trust between students and adults.

Life Readiness Solutions

The fourth track of the summit brought together a panel of educators, policy makers, and community-based-organization representatives to discuss the status of “life readiness” of high school graduates. The four major themes that were explored were:

1. *Issues of alignment.* The group discussed the lack of connection between the current state assessment program and college expectations. The result of this disconnect is a curriculum divide between what students experience in high school and what they experience in college. Significant numbers of entering freshmen – who demonstrated proficiency in high school – are not ready for first-year college course expectations. Secondary schools and institutions of higher education must ensure that transitions are improved through better alignment of coursework, assessments, teaching styles and academic skill expectations.
2. *Career awareness.* There was a consensus that more focus on careers in high school would heighten the sense of relevance for students. Increased focus on careers must transcend simply by making changes in programming. It must ensure that both teachers and parents are aware of current labor trends and prerequisite skills for specific professions and the 21st Century workplace, and it must entail the creation of stronger links between high schools and postsecondary education.
3. *Counseling.* The current model of counseling for high school students simply does not work. The average counselor load in high school is between 300 and 600 students, making it impossible to spend much time with individual students, let alone build personal relationships with them. Additionally, instructional schedules do not allow for extended counseling opportunities. Finally, there are not coherent or unifying themes and emphases around counseling services. Lack of personalization, lack of access, and lack of programming mean that this traditional source of student support – especially in preparation for post-graduation experiences – is simply not a reality for the typical high school student.
4. *Financing For College.* Many students have difficulty affording college. At one time, the KEES Scholarship Program provided major hope for increasing access to college. However, KEES grants have not kept pace with college tuition, which

has increased by 208 percent since 1999 when KEES was instituted. The maximum KEES award of \$2,500 *and* the average KEES award of \$1,379 are not sufficient to really expand college access for Kentucky's high school graduates.

After tabletop discussions, the group settled on the following five ideas as its emerging recommendations:

1. Freshman academies should be institutionalized at all schools as a means to personalize the high school experience for 9th graders.
2. The availability of and access to dual credit and advanced placement course work must be increased as a way to enhance college readiness.
3. Initiate Pathways Ideas and pilot with JCTC, which targets preparation for the health care industry and utilizes career managers, should be viewed as a prototype for similar programming.
4. Specific college and career programming should be instituted in high schools beginning at the freshman level (e.g., the Junior Achievement Freshman Pilot).
5. JCPS secondary schools must create a culture in which college or other postsecondary training is a viable goal for every student regardless of their academic track or family economics.

The overarching message of this group was two-fold. First, the high school experience must be redesigned to ensure preparation for college success. Second, public structures must be expanded to address financial barriers that preclude many youth from even considering college as a viable postsecondary option. In addition, during the report out to the entire conference the group leader talked about the importance of parent involvement.

CLOSING SESSION

After the four concurrent track sessions, the summit participants reassembled to hear feedback from national representatives and to report the groups' recommendations to the Mayor and Superintendent.

Caroline Brachman from America's Promise Alliance praised both the scope of participation and the substance of the work of the summit. Louisville's was the third of the 105 summits that America's Promise plans to support and is one of 12 that will continue receiving technical assistance from the alliance. Brachman attended the policy track session and was impressed to see the cross-sector nature of the discussion. She said the example Louisville sets will be used to inform the other summits.

Lillian Pace, education policy staff member for U.S. Congressman John Yarmuth, talked about his hopes for No Child Left Behind (NCLB) reforms. She told the participants that it is critical to have community groups involved and active in promoting the reforms. Pace asserted that graduation rates should have more prominence in the accountability system and that more federal funding should be directed to middle and high schools.

Andrew Moore from the National League of Cities described a three-part formula for effective community engagement in school improvement: a strong bond between a community's mayor and superintendent, large-scale participation, and a broad agenda that incorporates many concerns. Moore was pleased to see each of those ingredients in Louisville's summit. He described a major initiative in which the league is helping to develop an innovative portfolio of high school approaches, such as alternative and magnet schools, in Nashville, Newark and Indianapolis.

Representatives of the four working groups described their tracks' top recommendations, after which Dr. Berman and Mayor Abramson responded.

Dr. Berman strongly endorsed the emphasis on increasing student support and engagement, but also said he was surprised that the issue of academic rigor was not explicitly raised, saying, "We need to challenge students and interest them." He noted the recommendations about student safety and said he would like to pursue the topic further with the Mayor. He also suggested that more school nurses would help prevent absenteeism. Berman again stressed the importance that he, like the participants, places on career readiness and emphasized his belief that parental engagement is critical.

Mayor Abramson reminded the group that dropout prevention must begin early and that we must find ways to better engage the 10-13 age group. Abramson agreed that

transportation to and from after-school programs is a key community issue to which he would seek solutions. The Mayor was especially intrigued by innovative ideas for the early years, especially the recommendation to consider developing non-graded K-8 schools. Abramson said he was surprised that the groups did not emphasize more parent accountability, saying, “Parents should literally be told, ‘You need to participate!’”

The Mayor concluded the summit by asserting, “The bottom line is that it really does take a village. We all have a stake in this outcome. We all have a stake in those solutions. One in four is too many. It spells limited opportunities for those young people and the families they are likely to have. It adds up to a workforce that does not have the skills for the jobs of today and tomorrow. It means fewer Louisville residents able and eager to take their place as well-informed, engaged citizens in the years ahead.”

The Mayor stressed that success will require sustained commitment and effort. “It ain’t over. We need to come back together and grade ourselves and challenge ourselves to do it next year.”